SCRIPTURE

THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD

GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

VOLUME II · STUDY EDITION

MINISTER JAVIER AYALA

MINISTERIO1 · 2026

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The Upward Call of God

God's purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ

> “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”
>
> Philippians 3:14 · King James Version

Series: The Eternal Purpose of God · Volume II

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Digital EPUB edition · Ministerio1 · 2026
Soli Deo Gloria

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Musical Presentation

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PROLOGUE

The Christian life does not begin in human initiative nor does it end in a past decision. God the Father conceived an eternal purpose; the Lord Jesus Christ completed the redemptive work; the Holy Spirit applies that work and transforms the believer; and God Himself will carry His purpose to glorification. Within that divine work, the believer runs, obeys, perseveres and grows.

Philippians 3:14 presents that active response: I press toward the mark. The apostle Paul does not run to persuade God to receive him. He runs because the Lord Jesus Christ has already taken hold of him. Nor is he seeking a spirituality reserved for a select minority. He runs toward the consummation of the calling that comes from God and exists only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This volume will study the verse within its paragraph, the entire Epistle to the Philippians, and the general development of the New Testament. Greek analysis will be at the service of meaning; the doctrine will be born from the context; and pastoral application will seek to produce perseverance born of love, not obedience manufactured through fear.

Salvation is not an improvised project. Before the foundation of the world, God established a holy purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ. That purpose includes election, calling, justification, sanctification, maturity, and glorification. These truths do not turn the believer into a passive spectator. They give the believer a foundation for running with hope.

INTRODUCTION

The Governing Text

> “12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”
>
> “13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,”
>
> “14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”
>
> Philippians 3:12–14 (King James Version)

Three movements govern this passage. First, the apostle Paul honestly acknowledges that he has not yet reached consummation or attained perfection. Second, he declares that he continues because he was taken hold of by the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, he focuses his life in one direction: he leaves behind what could hold him back and reaches toward what lies ahead.

Verse 14 should not be separated from verse 12. The race of the apostle Paul is a response to the initiative of the Lord Jesus Christ. I press does not mean self-salvation. It means obedient cooperation with the purpose of the One who has already taken hold of him.

Doctrinal Thesis

The upward call of God is the calling that comes from God, is realized in the Lord Jesus Christ, and leads the believer toward the full consummation of the divine purpose: to know the Lord Jesus Christ, to be transformed into His image, to accomplish the works prepared by God, and to ultimately participate in the promised glorification.

This statement requires four clarifications:

1. The calling includes entry into salvation, but it does not end at the moment of conversion.
2. Maturity does not make up for any deficiency in the Cross; it manifests in life the purpose of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. The believer runs actively, but the entire race depends on the grace of God.
4. The goal is not to admire one's own perfection, but to know the Lord Jesus Christ and to be conformed to His image.

I. PHILIPPI AND THE EPISTLE OF PERSEVERING JOY

A congregation born in the midst of opposition

The church at Philippi arose through the preaching of the Gospel in a Roman colony. From its beginning, it knew conversion, conflict, imprisonment, and deliverance. Years later, the apostle Paul wrote while imprisoned. Therefore, his words about joy and the race do not come from a life sheltered from suffering.

The apostle Paul does not present joy as a denial of pain. He presents a joy rooted in the advance of the Gospel, the fellowship of the Church, and the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. The perseverance described in Philippians 3 belongs to a letter that calls believers to stand firm, live worthily, and preserve unity.

The good work that God will perfect

The initial confidence of the epistle prepares the teaching of chapter 3:

> “3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,”
>
> “4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,”
>
> “5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;”
>
> “6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of

> Jesus Christ:”
>
> Philippians 1:3–6 (King James Version)

God began the good work and God will complete it until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. This promise does not eliminate the obedience that fills the rest of the letter. It makes it possible. Christian perseverance rests on the faithfulness of God and is expressed through the faithfulness of the believer.

Living Worthy of the Gospel

The heavenly calling produces a visible citizenship and manner of life:

> “27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;”
>
> “28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.”
>
> “29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;”
>
> “30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”
>
> Philippians 1:27–30 (King James Version)

The apostle Paul unites steadfastness, unity, faith, and suffering. The race is not limited to the private development of character; it includes striving together for the faith of the Gospel. Christian

maturity has both personal and corporate dimensions.

II. THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF PHILIPPIANS 3

The righteousness that comes from God

Before speaking of goal and prize, the apostle Paul rejects all confidence in his religious credentials:

> "7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."
>
> "8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,"
>
> "9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:"
>
> Philippians 3:7–9 (King James Version)

The race begins from a righteousness received by faith, not toward a righteousness earned by human merit. The apostle Paul considers loss that which he previously used as a basis for acceptance. His gain is the Lord Jesus Christ.

This location of the passage is decisive. If Philippians 3:14 is interpreted as an effort to obtain justification, it contradicts the immediate statement of the apostle Paul. The runner is already in the Lord Jesus Christ and possesses the righteousness that comes

from God through faith.

Knowing the Lord Jesus Christ

The central desire of the apostle Paul appears in the verses that follow:

> “10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;”
>
> “11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”
>
> Philippians 3:10–11 (King James Version)

To know Him does not mean accumulating religious information. It includes communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, experience of the power of His resurrection, faithful participation in His sufferings, and hope of resurrection. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the center of the goal.

The phrase If, by any means does not express disbelief about the promised resurrection. It communicates reverent humility and willingness to walk the path God determines. The apostle Paul does not presume to know all the details of his course, but he knows the Lord who called him.

I Have Not Yet Attained

The apostle Paul rejects triumphalist perfectionism. After years of ministry, revelation, and suffering, he recognizes that he is not there yet. Authentic maturity does not need to feign consummation. The more the believer knows the Lord Jesus

Christ, the more clearly he recognizes how much he needs to continue growing.

The word translated perfect in verse 12 is related to reaching the goal or attaining consummation. In verse 15, the apostle Paul can call those who share this way of thinking perfect, or mature. There is no contradiction: the believer can be mature at his present stage without having reached final perfection.

III. EXEGESIS OF PHILIPPIANS 3:14

I Press — διώκω

The Greek form διώκω is present active indicative, first person singular. Depending on the context, the verb can convey the ideas of pursuing, going after something, or pressing on with intensity. The present tense describes the continuing direction of the apostle Paul's life: I keep pressing on; I continue moving forward.

There is a notable transformation within the same chapter. The apostle Paul had been, in terms of zeal, a persecutor of the Church. Now he uses the same verb to describe his pursuit of the goal. The Lord Jesus Christ did not eliminate the apostle Paul's capacity for wholehearted devotion; He redeemed its direction. The zeal that once destroyed now serves the purpose of God.

To the goal — κατὰ σκοπόν

The word σκοπός indicates that which is kept in view as an objective or mark. The preposition κατά directs the movement toward or according to that goal. The life of the apostle Paul is not scattered. His decisions are evaluated in light of one governing direction.

The goal should not be reduced to ministerial success, public influence, or accumulation of rewards. The immediate context defines the desire: to gain the Lord Jesus Christ, to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ, to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and to

participate in the consummation of His resurrected life.

For the Prize — εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον

The word βραβεῖον refers to the prize awarded to the victor in a contest. The apostle Paul uses a familiar image to emphasize purpose, discipline, and completion. The prize does not purchase access to the race. It belongs at the end of a race that began when the Lord Jesus Christ took hold of the runner.

The metaphor does not teach competition against other believers. The apostle Paul does not run to prevent another from receiving grace. He runs to fulfill God's particular purpose. In the Church, the growth of another believer does not diminish one's own inheritance; it can become an encouragement to persevere together.

Of the upward call — τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως

The word κλῆσις means calling. The adverb ἄνω means above, from above, or upward. The King James Version renders the phrase high calling, communicating the dignity and heavenly origin of the call. The Greek expression, however, does not establish an elitist distinction between believers with ordinary callings and believers with superior callings.

The expression may be translated call from above or upward call. Both ideas harmonize with the passage: God is the one who calls from above, and the call directs the believer toward his heavenly consummation. The context must govern the choice, without building a doctrine on a single translation possibility.

Of God — τοῦ θεοῦ

The calling belongs to God. It is not born of personal ambition, institutional pressure or desire for superiority. God determines its origin, content and purpose. This truth is humbling: the runner did not design the race. It also produces security: the purpose does not ultimately depend on the fragility of the runner.

In Christ Jesus — ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

The calling exists in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no Christian goal separate from the Lord Jesus Christ nor a maturity that leaves him behind. Everything begins, continues and culminates in union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The expression in Christ Jesus protects against moralism. The goal is not simply to become a more disciplined person. It is to live from the new position granted in the Lord Jesus Christ and to be transformed according to the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. TAKEN HOLD OF IN ORDER TO PRESS ON

The initiative of the Lord Jesus Christ

The apostle Paul declares: I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. The action of the Lord Jesus Christ precedes and grounds the action of the apostle Paul. Grace does not destroy effort; it destroys boasting and redeems effort.

The believer can say simultaneously, God sustains me and I press. Both statements are biblical when the proper order is preserved. God does not respond to an autonomous race; the believer responds to God's effectual calling.

Work Out, for God Works In

The same epistle presents this relationship:

> “12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”
>
> “13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”
>
> Philippians 2:12–13 (King James Version)

The believer works out his salvation because God works in him both to will and to act. Work out does not mean completing an insufficient atonement. It means bringing the salvation received

into obedient expression, with reverence before the active work of God.

The grace that teaches

Saving grace also forms a way of living:

> “11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,”
>
> “12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;”
>
> “13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;”
>
> “14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”
>
> Titus 2:11–14 (King James Version)

Grace teaches believers to renounce ungodliness, to live soberly, and to wait. The blessed hope does not produce passivity. Grace forms a people zealous for good works, purified to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

V. THE ETERNAL PLAN OF GOD THE FATHER

Chosen in the Lord Jesus Christ

The purpose did not begin when the believer understood the Gospel:

> “3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:”
>
> “4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:”
>
> “5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,”
>
> “6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”
>
> Ephesians 1:3–6 (King James Version)

God the Father chose His people in the Lord Jesus Christ and predestined them for adoption. Election has a moral and relational purpose: that they should be holy and blameless before God, received as children through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage offers no basis for spiritual pride. Everything is to the praise of the glory of His grace. An understanding of election that produces arrogance has been separated from the purpose

that the text declares.

The hope of the calling

The apostle Paul prayed that the Church would understand the hope and power associated with the calling:

> “15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,”
>
> “16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;”
>
> “17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:”
>
> “18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,”
>
> “19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,”
>
> “20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,”
>
> “21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:”
>
> “22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,”
>
> “23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in

> all.”
>
> Ephesians 1:15–23 (King James Version)

Spiritual understanding requires illumination granted by God. The power that works on behalf of the believer is measured by the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hope is not human optimism; it rests in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, seated above every principality and authority.

Created for good works

Salvation by grace leads to a life prepared by God:

> “8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:”
>
> “9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.”
>
> “10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”
>
> Ephesians 2:8–10 (King James Version)

Works do not cause salvation. The believer is God's workmanship, created in the Lord Jesus Christ to walk in the works that God prepared beforehand. The race has concrete content: acts of obedience, service, and love ordained by God.

VI. CONFORMING TO THE IMAGE OF THE SON

The Purpose Revealed in Romans 8

> “28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”
>
> “29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”
>
> “30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”
>
> Romans 8:28–30 (King James Version)

Romans 8:28 does not promise that every circumstance will be pleasant. It affirms that God works in all things according to His purpose. The next verse defines that purpose: to be conformed to the image of the Son of God.

The sequence foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified highlights the certainty of the divine work. Glorification appears in the past tense to express the certainty of the purpose from God's perspective. The believer still awaits its final manifestation, but God's faithfulness guarantees its consummation.

The Firstborn among many brethren

Conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ does not erase His uniqueness. The Lord Jesus Christ remains the Firstborn among many brethren: supreme in rank, the origin of the new humanity, and the center of the redeemed family.

Being made like the Lord Jesus Christ does not mean participating in the divine essence or becoming an object of worship. It means reflecting His holiness, love, obedience, and glory according to the redeemed condition that God grants to His children.

Christ formed in the believer

The apostle Paul expressed this process pastorally:

> "19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,"
>
> Galatians 4:19 (King James Version)

The formation of the Lord Jesus Christ describes the visible development of His character in the believer. It does not mean that the Lord Jesus Christ is incomplete. It means that the life of the believer must progressively correspond to the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ who dwells and reigns.

VII. THE FINISHED WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

A Perfect Offering

Christian sanctification rests on the effectiveness of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ:

> “10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”
>
> “11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:”
>
> “12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;”
>
> “13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.”
>
> “14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”
>
> Hebrews 10:10–14 (King James Version)

The offering of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ was made once for all. Verse 14 brings together a completed standing and a continuing process: He has perfected for ever those who are sanctified. The security of the finished work does not negate growth; it grounds it.

Reconciled to Be Presented Holy

>

> “19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;”
>
> “20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”
>
> “21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled”
>
> “22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight:”
>
> “23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;”
>
> Colossians 1:19–23 (King James Version)

Reconciliation was accomplished by the blood of the Cross. Its purpose includes presenting the believer holy, blameless, and above reproach. The exhortation to remain grounded and steadfast does not add merit to the blood; it describes the perseverance characteristic of those who continue in the hope of the Gospel.

The goal remains Christ-centered

The believer never progresses beyond the Cross. He grows in the understanding and manifestation of its effects. Any maturity that diminishes the need for the Lord Jesus Christ is a form of religious pride, not the upward call of God.

VIII. CONTINUING FORMATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Transformed from glory to glory

> “17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”
>
> “18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”
>
> 2 Corinthians 3:17–18 (King James Version)

The Holy Spirit produces freedom and transformation as the believer beholds the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Transformation is not born from self-obsession. The believer's gaze is directed toward the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit forms His image.

The expression from glory to glory communicates real progress. The believer should not deny what God has already transformed or pretend that he does not need further transformation. Gratitude and humility can coexist.

Sanctification of the Holy Spirit

> “13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:”

> “14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
>
> 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14 (King James Version)

The calling through the Gospel, the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, and the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ appear united. The Holy Spirit does not offer a spirituality separate from the Gospel. He applies the truth and leads believers toward the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Work That Encompasses the Whole Person

> “23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
>
> “24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”
>
> 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 (King James Version)

The apostle Paul's prayer encompasses spirit, soul, and body. Without entering into a technical division of the human constitution, the emphasis is wholeness: God sanctifies completely. The final promise returns to divine faithfulness: Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

IX. MATURITY UNTO THE FULLNESS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Gifts and the Edification of the Body

> “11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;”
>
> “12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:”
>
> “13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”
>
> “14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;”
>
> “15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:”
>
> “16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”
>
> Ephesians 4:11–16 (King James Version)

Maturity is not an individualistic project. The Lord Jesus Christ gives gifted persons to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for the edification of the body. Each member participates

according to the working that God grants.

The corporate goal includes unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, and the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The mature Church is not controlled by deceptive doctrines or domineering personalities; it learns to speak the truth in love and to grow in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Present Everyone Mature

> "27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"
>
> "28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:"
>
> "29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."
>
> Colossians 1:27–29 (King James Version)

The apostle Paul proclaims, admonishes, and teaches so that he may present every believer mature in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perfect communicates maturity or completeness, not present sinlessness. Ministerial labor is intense, but the apostle Paul recognizes that he strives according to the power of the Lord Jesus Christ working mightily in him.

Maturity and humility

Biblical maturity does not proclaim its own superiority. It acknowledges dependence, receives correction, and serves. The

mature believer does not leave weaker brothers and sisters behind; he becomes better able to uphold them with patience and truth.

X. THE CHRISTIAN RACE

Lay Aside Every Weight and Run

> “1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”
>
> “2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
>
> “3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”
>
> Hebrews 12:1–3 (King James Version)

The race requires laying aside every weight and sin. A weight may not be evil in itself, yet it may hinder a particular act of obedience. Sin besets and entangles. The answer is not to admire one's own strength, but to run with endurance, with one's eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of faith. He endured the Cross, despised the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Considering the Lord Jesus Christ guards against weariness that ends in spiritual fainting.

Forgetting what is left behind

The apostle Paul did not lose his memory. In the same chapter, he recalls his own history. Forgetting means that the past no longer controls the direction of the race. Achievements do not become grounds for proud repose; failures do not become sources of paralyzing condemnation.

The Gospel enables the believer to remember truthfully and to move forward in freedom. The believer confesses sin, learns through discipline, and receives forgiveness. He is also grateful for victories without living on them as though past obedience could replace present faithfulness.

Reaching Forward

The image communicates concentrated effort. The runner leans towards the finish line. He does not try to run simultaneously in opposite directions. Perseverance requires decisions: saying no to certain distractions to say yes to God's purpose.

XI. THE FINAL GLORIFICATION

We will be like the Lord Jesus Christ

> "1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."
>
> "2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."
>
> "3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."
>
> 1 John 3:1–3 (King James Version)

Christian hope culminates in seeing the Lord Jesus Christ as He is. Future likeness does not produce empty speculation; it produces present purification. Whoever expects to see Him desires to please Him.

The transformation of the body

Philippians chapter 3 concludes with the bodily transformation:

> "20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:"
>
> "21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto

himself."

Philippians 3:20–21 (King James Version)

Heavenly citizenship does not despise the body. The believer awaits the Savior, who will transform the body of humiliation and conform it to the body of His glory. Glorification is the work of the sovereign power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The heavenly image

> "49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."
>
> "50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."
>
> "51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,"
>
> "52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."
>
> "53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:49–53 (King James Version)

The resurrection completes what human discipline can never achieve: incorruptibility and immortality. The believer runs, but does not resurrect himself. The final goal depends on the creative power of God.

XII. SALVATION, SANCTIFICATION AND REWARD

A work with different aspects

Justification declares the believer righteous on the basis of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sanctification sets the believer apart for God and progressively transforms his life. Glorification will finish the work in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. These distinctions help to read the New Testament without confusing foundation, process, and consummation.

The reward of Philippians 3:14 should not be used to deny the free gift of justification. Neither should the reward be emptied of all significance. God honors the faithfulness produced by His own grace. The believer values the prize because he values the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ, not because he wishes to compete with the Cross.

Running from a Position of Acceptance

Human religion often runs in order to gain acceptance. The Gospel calls the believer to run from the acceptance already granted in the Beloved. This difference transforms motivation. Servile fear constantly asks whether it has done enough to deserve love. Faith obeys because it has known the love of God manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love does not reduce the seriousness of obedience:

> “15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.”
>
> John 14:15 (King James Version)

Obedience born of love can be costly, but it is not a commercial negotiation. The believer keeps the commandments because he loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

XIII. THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD

A continuous line of grace

The doctrines studied are not isolated pieces. They form a single work:

1. **God the Father chose:** Before the foundation of the world, God the Father chose His people in the Lord Jesus Christ for holiness and adoption.
2. **God predestined:** The stated purpose is to conform the believer to the image of the Son of God.
3. **God called:** The Gospel came with power, and the Holy Spirit applied the truth to the heart.
4. **God justified:** The righteousness of God was received by faith, apart from human merit.
5. **The Holy Spirit sanctifies:** The image of the Lord Jesus Christ is progressively formed in the believer.
6. **The believer runs:** Having been taken hold of by the Lord Jesus Christ, the believer continues toward the goal with perseverance.
7. **God will glorify:** The body will be transformed, and the believer will see the Lord Jesus Christ and will be like Him.

The beginning, the process and the consummation

Salvation is not the end of God's purpose; it is the entrance into a glorious work. Yet salvation should not be spoken of as though it

were a small work. The term can encompass God's entire purpose: deliverance from sin, new life, sanctification, and glorification.

That is why it is more accurate to say that conversion does not exhaust the purpose of salvation. God not only frees the believer from condemnation; He adopts, transforms, incorporates the believer into the Church, employs the believer in good works, and leads the believer toward the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The security that produces movement

The certainty of God's purpose does not produce immobility when understood biblically. The apostle Paul contemplates the secure chain of Romans 8 and, at the same time, runs in Philippians 3. Security eliminates desperation, not diligence.

God preserves His people through promises, exhortations, discipline, fellowship, Word and prayer. The believer perseveres because God is faithful, and the believer's perseverance manifests the reality of that work.

XIV. PASTORAL APPLICATION

For Those Who Fear They Have Not Advanced Enough

The apostle Paul recognized that he had not reached consummation. Christian growth is not measured by anxious comparison with other people. The believer should examine his direction: is he returning to the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving His Word and responding to correction?

Slowness should not be celebrated, but neither should it be confused with abandonment. God works with patience. The step of obedience that seems small today can be part of a work that God promised to perfect.

For Those Who Live in the Past

Past achievements can become idols and failures can become prisons. The Gospel calls the believer to surrender both to the Lord Jesus Christ. Be thankful for yesterday's grace, confess yesterday's sin, and obey today.

For Pastors and Teachers

Christian ministry seeks to present mature believers, not keep them dependent on the personality of the leader. This requires thorough teaching, loving admonishment, patience, and example. The minister works intensely, but recognizes the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the Church

The Church runs together. Gifts equip; each member serves; the truth is spoken in love; and the body grows in the Lord Jesus Christ. A mature congregation does not eliminate legitimate differences, but it rejects the rivalry that turns calling into competition.

For Those Who Are Suffering

The race includes suffering. The Lord Jesus Christ does not abandon the believer during the trial. Suffering has no authority to redefine God's eternal purpose. It can hurt deeply and yet be included in the work by which God forms perseverance, hope, and likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

XV. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TEACHING

1. Am I running for acceptance, or from the acceptance granted in the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. What does Philippians 3:7–9 reveal about the believer's foundation of righteousness?
3. How does knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ first took hold of me change the way I run?
4. What is the difference between present maturity and final perfection?
5. What weight should I lay aside even if it is not necessarily a sin?
6. What sin should I confess because it is hindering my obedience?
7. Is my understanding of calling centered on personal achievement or on knowing the Lord Jesus Christ?
8. How does my congregation participate in forming mature believers?
9. In what work prepared by God should I walk at this stage?
10. Does the hope of glorification move me toward present purity?
11. Am I speaking the truth in love and receiving it with humility?
12. What aspect of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ is the

Holy Spirit presently forming in me?

XVI. CONCLUSION

The upward call of God is not a ladder by which a human being ascends in order to merit God's favor. It is the calling that comes from God, takes hold of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and directs him toward the heavenly consummation of the divine purpose.

The apostle Paul runs because he was taken hold of. He renounces his own righteousness because he received the righteousness that comes from God. He desires to know the Lord Jesus Christ because the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than all achievement. He recognizes that he is not there yet, but he does not make his imperfection an excuse to stop.

God the Father did not improvise salvation. Before the foundation of the world, He chose His people in the Lord Jesus Christ; He predestined them to conformity to His Son; He called them through the Gospel; He justified them by faith; He sanctifies them by the Holy Spirit; He builds them up within the Church; and He will finally glorify them.

The Gospel does not begin with the fear of being lost, but with the love of God manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor does it culminate merely in escape from condemnation. It culminates when God's purpose is accomplished, the believer sees the Lord Jesus Christ, and is conformed to His image.

That is why the believer presses on. He does not run alone. He does not run to purchase love. He does not run without direction.

He runs because the Lord Jesus Christ called him, took hold of him, and remains faithful. The goal is ahead; grace works within; the Lord Jesus Christ awaits at the finish.

> “14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”
>
> Philippians 3:14 (King James Version)

DOCTRINAL SUMMARY

1. **The origin of the call:** The calling comes from God, not from human ambition.
2. **The sphere of the call:** The whole purpose is realized in the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. **The foundation of the race:** The believer runs because the Lord Jesus Christ has already taken hold of him.
4. **The runner's righteousness:** Acceptance before God is received by faith, not by merit.
5. **The goal of the race:** To know the Lord Jesus Christ and to be conformed to His image.
6. **The nature of the call:** ἄνω communicates heavenly origin and direction, not an elitist category.
7. **The action of the believer:** διώκω expresses a continuous and concentrated pursuit of the goal.
8. **The work of the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit transforms the believer from glory to glory.
9. **The corporate dimension:** The Church grows toward maturity through truth, love, and the service of each member.
10. **The consummation:** Glorification will transform the believer and complete God's eternal purpose.

NOTE ON THE GREEK TEXT

Philippians 3:14 reads: *katà skopòn diṓkō eis tò brabeîon tês ánō klḗseōs toû theoû en Christô Iēsoû*. The principal forms are: σκοπόν, masculine accusative singular noun, mark (Strong G4649); διώκω, present active indicative, first person singular, I press (G1377); βραβεῖον, neuter accusative singular noun, prize (G1017); κλήσεως, genitive singular feminine noun, calling (G2821); and ἄνω, adverb, above, from above, or upward (G507).

The present tense διώκω describes the continuing action of the apostle Paul. The genitive construction relates the prize to the calling that belongs to God. The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ identifies the decisive sphere: the calling and its consummation exist in the Lord Jesus Christ.

SOURCES AND STUDY CRITERIA

- **Biblical text:** King James Version (KJV), with the passages cited in full wherever they support the argument.
- **Greek text:** *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (SBLGNT), with MorphGNT morphological analysis.
- **Lexical tools:** Strong's Concordance and New Testament Greek lexicons, used under the governance of syntax and context.
- **Method:** Historical-grammatical interpretation, attention to the complete argument of the epistles, biblical comparison, and pastoral application.

Lexical definitions offer possible meanings; the context determines which meaning applies. No tradition, theological system, or personal experience replaces the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

FINAL PRAYER

God our Father, thank You that Your purpose does not depend on our strength. Thank You for taking hold of us in the Lord Jesus Christ and for the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Grant us grace to forget what holds us back, to reach toward what lies ahead, and to press on with love, humility, and hope. Form in us the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, build up Your Church, and complete the good work until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Minister Javier Ayala

The Cross of Christ